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SUBJECT: LABOR ANALYSIS: ZCTU'S INTERNAL STRUGGLES (PART 2
OF 2)

REF: A. HARARE 275
[1](#)B. 07 HARARE 1004

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) This is the second in a two-part series analyzing the labor movement in Zimbabwe. Part one (Ref A) examined the history of the labor movement and the current struggles unions are facing. Part two examines the internal political struggles within the labor movement and its relationship with the MDC leadership.

[1](#)2. (C) As the largest force for workers' rights in Zimbabwe since independence, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has transformed itself from an appendage of the ZANU-PF government in the early 1980s, to an opposition force throughout the 1990s, and now is closely affiliated with the MDC. Labor politics in Zimbabwe, however, are dirty, and ZCTU's current leadership has been described by its own affiliates as undemocratic, selfish, and controlling. While still maintaining the appearance of solidarity with international observers, ZCTU affiliate unions are unhappy with ZCTU's efforts to advance labor in Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY.

ZCTU Leaders: Motivated by Politics or Power?

[1](#)3. (C) ZCTU has evolved from a tool of ZANU-PF in the early 1980s, to an opposition force in the 1990s, to a close ally of the MDC for the last decade (Ref A). In 2000, now-Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai ended his 11-year tenure as the ZCTU's Secretary General to form the MDC, taking a host of labor leaders with him and creating a leadership vacuum within ZCTU. In a meeting on March 26, ZCTU's Secretary General Wellington Chibembe -- who initially worked in a

railway union -- unconvincingly explained to poloffs that he didn't really want to be selected Secretary General at ZCTU's 2001 conference, but he grudgingly accepted when it appeared no one else would step up to the position. At the 2001 ZCTU General Conference the other prominent leadership role was filled by Lovemore Matombo as President.

¶4. (C) While the two are widely touted by international labor movements as heroes and champions of labor rights, they are controversial figures within the labor movement in Zimbabwe. Union leaders described strained relationships between the two and factions within ZCTU that follow each leader. Notably, Tsvangirai reportedly retains a closer relationship with Matombo.

¶5. (C) Several leaders we spoke with question whether Matombo and Chibebe are motivated by a desire to help workers or political power and international recognition. On March 18, Raymond Majongwe, Secretary General of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) -- who admitted he does not get along with Chibebe -- told us that he and other affiliates are upset that ZCTU has not taken significant action to challenge either the government or the MDC in the last year. He admitted ZCTU has issued some statements, but complained that they haven't "actually done anything" in the last year. Majongwe opined that Chibebe and Matombo are more motivated by international travel and fame than continuing ZCTU's role as a vocal and visible force calling for human rights and improved work conditions.

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¶6. (C) On March 19, Matthew Takaona, President of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, also complained to us that ZCTU had become too quiet in seeking political interventions in the last couple years. He said that ZCTU has been reluctant to launch interventions or protests against the cash shortages, school closures, and political violence in 2008. He opined that ZCTU has grown overly dependent on its sister organization, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to make public statements and push for regional pressure on Zimbabwe.

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Vote Rigging Allegations within ZCTU Leadership
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¶7. (C) Some labor leaders report that the current "undemocratic" Executive Council resulted from a questionable election at the 2006 ZCTU General Conference. Wellington Likukuma, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Bankers and Allied Workers Union; Tonderai Kanengoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Transportation and General Workers Union, and Majongwe told us separately between March 16 and 26 that First Vice President Lucia Matibenga had severely exaggerated the membership of her union to gain more votes in the 2006 ZCTU elections. All three told us that Matibenga had bought the Executive Council by claiming her union had a membership of 42,000 employees rather than its actual membership of around 15,000. (NOTE: In electing the leadership at the General Conference every five years, each affiliate is allocated one vote per 1,000 union members. END NOTE.)

¶8. (C) By inflating the size of her union and exploiting her close relationship to Matombo, Matibenga ensured that she was elected First Vice President. According to Majongwe, Likukuma, and Kanengoni, the majority of the nine-member ZCTU Executive is beholden to Matibenga as a result of the 2006 election. The current leadership will remain until the next ZCTU General Conference, scheduled for 2011. (NOTE: Matibenga is a controversial figure and faced allegations of rigging votes in the MDC Women's Assembly as well (Ref. B). END NOTE.)

¶9. (C) Majongwe further criticized the Executive Council for its notable exclusion of representatives of civil servants,

who comprise a majority of the formal labor force. The Employers, Confederation of Zimbabwe estimated in mid-March that just 6 percent of Zimbabweans work in the formal economy; 80 percent of whom work for the Zimbabwean government. Separately, the Ministry of Finance told us civil servants make up half of the formally employed. Based on these estimates, only 1 percent to 3 percent of Zimbabweans work in the formal private sector. (NOTE: Because the Public Service Act, which governs public sector employees, does not allow government workers the right to collective bargaining, there are no strong unions for civil servants other than teachers. END NOTE.)

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Little Public Action Since Violent 2006 Protests

¶10. (C) In the 1990s and early 2000s, ZCTU spearheaded numerous large and effective stay-aways and marches, often resulting in repeated arrests, beatings, and sometimes torture by security forces. ZCTU's current leadership has been arrested and beaten on numerous occasions, although since 2006, there have been few large public rallies led by ZCTU. During protests in September 2006 calling for living wages and anti-retroviral drugs for those living with HIV, Chibebe, Matombo, Matibenga and other labor leaders were arrested and then brutally beaten and tortured by police. Chibebe showed us the scars from the plate placed in his

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forearm. He continues to suffer pain and can no longer make a fist with his left hand because of the injuries he sustained in police custody. He told us that ZANU-PF hardliner Didymus Mutasa, now Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, had ordered their beating. In a February meeting, Matibenga held up her arm that was broken by police in 2006 and proclaimed she was tired of getting beaten.

¶11. (SBU) Nevertheless, the 2006 protests and beatings greatly increased the ZCTU leaders' international recognition and prominence, leading to travel, awards, and speaking engagements for the leaders. The beatings also appear to have served their purpose to discourage mass popular action by ZCTU, as there have been few large or effective popular protests by ZCTU since then.

Where's the Money?

¶12. (C) When asked about ZCTU's leadership, Likukuma shook his head and described them as a "selfish lot." He decried the status of his union, which is suffering financially, while ZCTU builds its relationships with international organizations and fails to distribute assistance to other unions. Takaona told us ZCTU had offered his union members limited assistance in the last year: US\$100 per month to seven journalists who were fired from the Zimbabwe Broadcast Company (ZBC) while their labor dispute drags on, and some money to supplement the union's rent. Kanengoni also complained about a lack of funds coming from ZCTU, which he believes has significant access to international resources. (COMMENT: We doubt ZCTU has adequate resources to help all of its affiliates. In our visits to ZCTU's crowded offices, modern computers are notably absent. END COMMENT.)

Attempts to Micromanage the Affiliates (and Us)

¶13. (C) Majongwe and Likukuma also explained that ZCTU has at times interfered with affiliates' activities and sought to reign in "errant" messages. Majongwe, who is routinely featured in the local and international and local press on

teacher's issues -- without seeking ZCTU permission -- believes ZCTU leadership seeks to neutralize his union (PTUZ) by courting the alternative union, Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA), to join ZCTU. As the larger of the two teachers' unions, ZIMTA's votes could cancel out PTUZ's at future General Conference meetings. ZIMTA Chief Executive Officer Sophiso Ndlovu told us that he believed by joining ZCTU, ZIMTA would have increased access to funds through ZCTU's international partners.

¶14. (C) In the same vein, it is worth noting that our March 26 meeting with Chibebe began with a scolding. Chibebe chided poloff that a February closed-door round-table of labor leaders, which included poloffs, labor economist Godfrey Kanyenze (who directs the research arm of ZCTU), Majongwe, Matibenga, and the ZCTU Acting Secretary General, QMajongwe, Matibenga, and the ZCTU Acting Secretary General, should have been organized with the permission of ZCTU. During the round-table at the Embassy, organized to introduce a visiting poloff to labor issues, union and ZCTU leaders openly disagreed about whether or not the MDC should join the unity government.

¶15. (C) Although we viewed this as an open and healthy debate at the time, Chibebe was clearly unhappy that we had sought out other labor leaders' opinions. He told us that only the ZCTU executive can speak for ZCTU, "regardless of

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what local affiliates think." Fisseha Tekie of the Solidarity Center, which works closely with Chibebe, also told us that the round-table had stoked differences between the labor leaders and we should engage ZCTU leadership and the affiliate unions separately. We apologized to both Tekie and Chibebe if we had offended them, but assured both that we understood there were differences of opinion among labor leaders about political issues, which is why we seek out wide-ranging opinions.

Tsvangirai Seeks to Retain Influence

¶16. (C) According to several recent press reports, Tsvangirai is considering naming Chibebe as governor of Harare and Matibenga as governor of Masvingo. Chibebe explained to us that he has not been formally asked to serve as governor, and that the MDC has neither confirmed nor denied the offer. Separately on March 26, Matibenga confirmed that the MDC had offered her the position, although political negotiations continue to leave Tsvangirai's candidates hanging while the issue of governorships remains unresolved.

¶17. (C) In regard to the offers, Takaona opined that Tsvangirai sought to remove Chibebe and Matibenga from ZCTU's Executive in favor of his closer ally, Matombo. In addition, governorships are not especially powerful, and Takaona believed that these appointments could be a means of neutralizing Chibebe and Matibenga's influence and power without a formal power struggle. Matibenga claimed that she would take the position if formally offered, although she preferred to continue in her current role as an MP and member of ZCTU's Executive. She further explained Tsvangirai had made the offer as a means to allay rumors of a continued rift between her and Tsvangirai following his decision to dissolve the MDC Women's Assembly in 2007, which she led (Ref B). (NOTE: Matibenga also serves on the International Labor Organization's Executive Council and would likely be forced to resign if she accepted the governorship. END NOTE.)

Dance With the One Who Brought You

¶18. (C) COMMENT: ZCTU has mastered its international public

relations game, securing awards from international unions, including several in the United States, and rightfully gaining recognition for the persecution it has long suffered at the hands of the ZANU-PF-led government. However, ZCTU clearly has neglected its own foot soldiers in recent years and engaged in ugly political infighting and power struggles.

None of the labor leaders we talked with spoke highly of ZCTU's leadership since Tsvangirai's departure.

¶19. (C) Although ZCTU likely does not have the significant resources affiliates would believe, perception is everything and the suffering affiliates have little empathy for the ZCTU executive's inability to provide financial resources. Qexecutive's inability to provide financial resources. Additionally, the close political relationship between the Executive and the MDC and international community only add to the belief that ZCTU should be able to provide resources to its struggling member unions.

¶20. (C) In some ways, the affiliates' comments about the ZCTU Executive mirror complaints about MDC leaders who have risen to prominence and then forget the "little guys" who brought them to power in the first place. Since the MDC was born of the labor movement, it is disappointing -- but perhaps not surprising -- that ZCTU's leadership would commit

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the same mistake and neglect its own constituents. END
COMMENT.

MCGEE